



Myths & Monsters

Information pack

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Touring Exhibitions
The Natural History Museum
Cromwell Road
London SW7 5BD
www.nhm.ac.uk/touringexhibitions

Email: touring@nhm.ac.uk
Tel: +44 (0)20 7942 6245

Exhibition overview

Unravelling the truth...

Thousands of years telling tall tales of heroic journeys and fabulous beasts have left us with enduring legends. Every culture has its mythical creatures, and many of them share the same origins. *Myths and Monsters* explores our best-known ancient myths and the possible scientific explanations behind them. It brings life to curriculum-based activities, such as ancient history, Greek mythology, creative writing, storytelling and zoology. The subject is intriguing, and the exhibition promises to be universally popular.

Myths and Monsters has been designed as a family blockbuster of approximately 450 square metres. The exhibition features five impressive animatronic models – a dragon, a chimera, a yeti, a cyclops and an alien – one graceful static model of a unicorn and additional graphic panels telling the story of the giant roc and mysterious sea creatures. It offers enormous potential both for education and merchandise and is supplied with exhibition text for translation and production of text panels by the hirer.



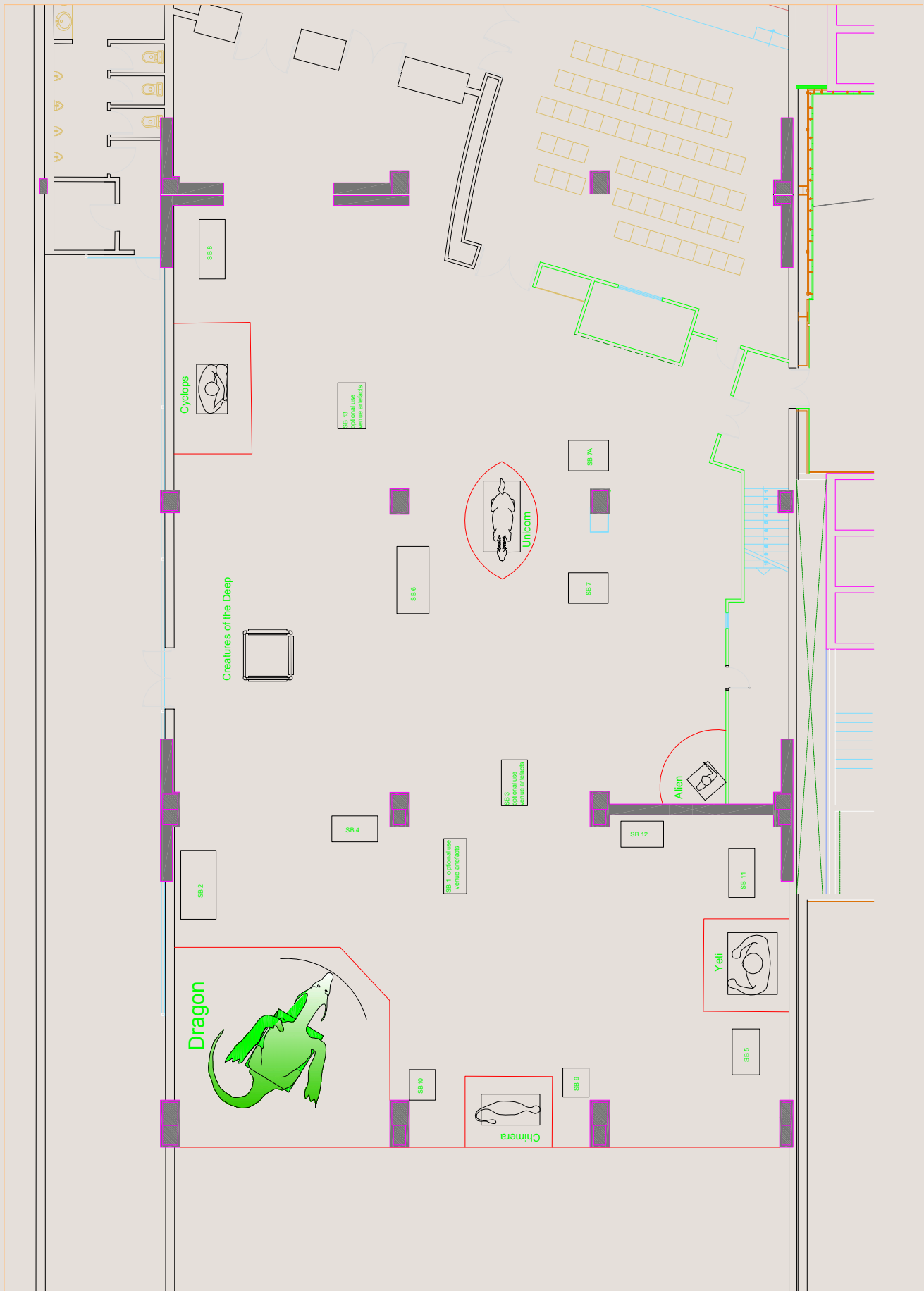
Aims of the exhibition

- explore ancient myths and learn about their possible scientific explanation
- be able to use the exhibition for curriculum-based activities
- discover the link between dragons and Chinese dinosaur sketches
- read thought-provoking facts
- handle specimens



Gallery plan

Please note: as the size and shape of the display area may vary from venue to venue, it is not always possible to show the exhibition in its original form and layout.



Scenes and storyline

Introduction area

Ambient water sounds, with whispers in different languages, recount sightings of strange creatures. Three mysterious Jenny Hanivers (sea creatures such as mermaids crafted from different animal parts) gaze out from a large case illuminated with UV lighting and a water effect. The exhibition title is behind them. The scene is set for the rest of the exhibition.



Dragon scene

The dragon, the most mythical of beasts, has two personalities: the benign dragon of the east and the evil incarnation of the devil from the west. But what provoked ancient people to believe dragons existed? The link between dragons and dinosaurs stretches back to 1600 BC, when Chinese writers first recorded the use of dragon bones in medicines. The dragon bones and teeth displayed in this scene are actually fossils from mammals and dinosaurs.



Unicorn scene

The legendary unicorn is a magical creature whose single horn was believed to possess powerful healing properties. The reality is stranger than fiction when we discover the real origin of the unicorn's horn is the spiralled tusk of an Arctic whale.



Chimera scene

The chimera in Greek mythology was a grotesque, three-headed monster. Added to the head of a lion, it bore the body of a she-goat and the tail of a dragon or snake. Modern-day chimeras from the realms of genetic science, such as the geep (half sheep, half goat) are just as thought-provoking.

Cyclops scene

Could anything be more terrifying than a giant whose facial symmetry is distorted by a huge single eye? The scientific origin of the human-like cyclops is truly fascinating. When the one-eyed man's skull was compared with elephant skulls, the true identity of the cyclops was revealed.



Wild men scene

The yeti is perhaps the most likely of all mythical creatures to exist. Reports of huge primate-like creatures abound in many of the most remote and mountainous parts of the world – could some be real? A replica of the yeti scalp brought to the Natural History Museum in 1961 for DNA testing is displayed alongside the giant animatronic yeti model.



Roc and phoenix graphic panel

Backlit graphic panel explaining the folklore of the roc.

The roc is born of the myth of an eagle-like bird, reputedly able to carry elephants. Could an ancestor of existing birds have provoked tales of this spectacular creature?

The phoenix is an even more famous mythical bird, which symbolises the sun, rebirth and fire. Like the purple heron, it has fiery colouring and a crest on its head. Could there be a link?



Sea creatures graphic panel

Three backlit graphic panels with seven images explaining stories of the various creatures of the deep.

Myths abound about creatures from the depths of the ocean, and some of the old mariners' visions are closer to the truth than we imagine. The world's seas hold extraordinary life forms whose inaccessible habitat keeps them from prying eyes. Of course, no myths exhibition is complete without an exploration of the numerous Loch Ness monster tales. One popular explanation for this aquatic creature is the survival of a plesiosaur, a long-necked marine reptile that lived at the time of the dinosaurs.



Alien scene

Scientists know that only a tiny fraction of the estimated 30 million species on Earth have been discovered. Bizarre creatures with the ability to survive on unfamiliar continents may yet turn out to be more than just figments of our wildest imagination.

Specifications

We provide

- five animatronic models with synchronised lighting and sound effects
- one static model with lighting and sound effects
- hands-on replicas: Komodo dragon, *Elasmotherium* skull, devil's toenails, horse and rhino teeth, ancient rhino horn and skull, narwhal tusk in 14 exhibition display flight cases
- exhibition graphics and text on CD
- background sound CD
- marketing toolkit
- suggestions for educational events
- installation and dismantling service
- technical support services
- instructions for day-to-day supervision

Average installation/dismantling period

- seven days

Minimum hire period

- three months

Venue requirements

- indoor display area of minimum 450 square metres
- environmentally controlled conditions
- minimum doorway height of 2.4m and 1.8m wide
- minimum ceiling height of 4m
- scenery, backdrops and barriers around the models
- transport costs from previous venue in two trailers
- storage facilities for transport cases
- translation of text and production of text panels if translating out of English
- skilled installation and dismantling support staff
- air compressor and pipework
- single-phase electrical supply
- forklift including driver, crane or other equipment, as required
- hoists and other equipment required for access, installation and dismantling
- staffing (the exhibition must be manned at all times)
- additional exhibition lighting
- promotion and publicity
- insurance (transit and public liability)

Press release

A major new exhibition at the Natural History Museum.

Open to the public:

Sunday 5 April – Sunday 13 September 1998

Cyclops, unicorn, yeti, dragon, chimera, the Loch Ness monster... are these creatures real or imagined? Giant moving models shrouded in mysterious pods set against a dramatic backdrop, each with its own sound effects and combined with Museum specimens, form a new and exciting exhibition at the Natural History Museum. In *Myths and Monsters*, visitors experience a breathtaking journey from ancient times, when legends of bizarre beasts first became embedded in different cultures, through to the present day, when science has often unravelled fact from fiction.

Myths and Monsters looks at each creature from a mythological, historical and scientific perspective and explores the vivid scope of the human imagination in creating such terrifying beasts. As an internationally renowned scientific research centre, the Natural History Museum's expertise is called upon to examine some of these bizarre findings, such as the 'yeti scalp' and 'yeti pelt', and look into possible explanations for the Loch Ness monster. Real specimens and replicas relating to some of these findings are on display in the exhibition.

The 'yeti scalp', borrowed for analysis by Sir Edmund Hillary during his Tibetan expeditions in the 1960s, was analysed by scientists at the Natural History Museum. It was claimed to belong to a giant human-like creature, and the exhibition reveals the truth of its origins. We do know that deep in wilderness areas of Asia, notably large apes survived until relatively recent times.

Other creatures explored in the exhibition include: the dragon, which in the West often represents evil and in the East is credited with beneficent powers; the white-horned unicorn, with its complex history and magical powers; the fearsome one-eyed cyclops; and the ever-elusive Loch Ness monster.

The chimera, which in Greek mythology was a fire-breathing monster with the head of a lion, body of a she-goat and tail of a dragon or snake, has in the

present day come to mean any organism containing genetically different tissues. Advances in modern genetic engineering mean the chimera does live on.

Views of the world have changed dramatically since stories of extraordinary creatures first filtered back from unfamiliar continents. However, scientists know that only a tiny fraction of the estimated 30 million species on Earth have been discovered. The exhibition ends with the unanswered question of whether it will ever be possible to unravel fact from fantasy beyond this planet. After all, nowhere is our imagination greater than in the realms of outer space.

Extract from "Through the Looking Glass" by Lewis Carroll

The unicorn's eye fell upon Alice...

'What is this?', he said at last.

'This is a child!' Haigha replied eagerly... 'We only found it today. It's as large as life, and twice as natural!'

'I always thought they were fabulous monsters!' said the unicorn...

Alice began, 'Do you know, I always thought unicorns were fabulous monsters too!'

'Well, now that we have seen each other,' said the unicorn, 'if you'll believe in me, I'll believe in you. Is that a bargain?'

'Yes, if you like,' said Alice.